

St Maria Bertilla Boscardin

Passages from the book:: RITRATTI DI SANTI by Antonio Sicari ed. Java Book



There are words from the Gospel that we often hear and keep in our hearts but which we find hard to fully understand and even more impossible to put into practice: “

“No; anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your servant...” (Matt. 20, 26-27).

With discomfort we also read the parables of the guests who choose the first places, while, according to Jesus, it was wise to prefer the last place, which had the privilege of the possibility, that He who was the Master of the house, would see us and call us to sit beside Him, just as a friend treats a friend.

For certain, the saints obeyed this word. They searched with true humility for the last place as slaves, in order to resemble the Lord Jesus who “came to serve and not to be served”; and nevertheless, they almost

always appear as though they were wrapped in an aura of splendour: mighty at times in the events of their lives: at times even in their sins from which they had to be torn from by force; mighty for the graces by which they were filled, or the miracles that accompanied them, or for the works they achieved in carrying out.

Some of them even succeeded in being great in humility, in littleness, just like Saint Theresa of Lisieux, even to the point of odium, like Saint Joseph Benedict Labre. This is the reason why many find it hard to understand and to put into practice what we are speaking about. What is there to be said when even the last place cannot be chosen? When it is a humiliated, daily condition, in which you are born and in which you must abide that which ruins the normal growth of the ego? When “feeling inferior to everyone else” is not a virtue, but a complex that should be taken care of by the freeing arts of psychoanalysis?

In these cases we seem to come up against a paradox. Those who are really the ‘last’, in every sense, are not facilitated for sanctity, in fact they are unable to think or believe it possible for them.

And since, even though it does not seem so, they are many who think that they are ill-treated by life, and therefore the consequences are that many feel excluded from sanctity rather than called to it.

The Church preaches to its children about the “universal vocation of sanctity” but the hearts of many object to this; there are conditions and conditionings, which have their beginnings from infancy and make even a normal life impossible, not to speak of sanctity.

On an evening in October, 1919, Sister Maria Bertilla Boscardin, a nurse in the hospital in Treviso, took part in the enclosure of the Carmelite Discalced of the city for the celebrations requested by the Fathers (“trium solemn honours” was written on the door of the consecrated building) to celebrate a newly Beatified of their order: Blessed Ann di San Bartolomeo, who had been secretary to the great Theresa d’Avila.

The Church was full of lights, ornaments and festive rites: “*let us become saints too*”, whispered Sister Bertilla to her companions, “*but saints in heaven and not on altars*”.

This way she tried to coincide with two requisites, which for her were difficult to reconcile: her profound desire for sanctity and the consciousness of her insignificance that could not bring her to imagine herself worthy of such honour.

Thirty years later and she herself will be risen to the “Glory” of Bernini.

Where saints are concerned, the Church is not deceived by appearances and recognise them in the figures of both Popes (Pope Pious X lived and was beatified in these years) and in that of a humble servant nun who was a nurse.

Maria Bertilla received this name from an Abbess who was of antique and noble origin, during the period of the Frank, on her entering the convent. But, even this solemn name seemed humble and ungraceful on Maria.

She had been christened Ann Francis; in her family and town she was known as Annette.

She was born in the small village of Colli Berici near Vicenza, in a home of poor illiterate farmers.

Her mother was a kind woman while her father was harsh and quarrelsome. His touchy character and jealousy worsened terribly when he was drunk; he became suspicious of his wife and covered her with rebukes, shouting and beatings.

The neighbours heard the shouting and shook their heads; they could do nothing more than take the child into their homes when she fled from her home terrified, she would sit in a corner, covering her eyes with her hands..

Sometimes Annette threw herself on her mother’s lap to protect her more than to protect herself; other times they succeeded in escaping to the loft; once they fled on foot towards Vicenza and spent the night under the portico of the Sanctuary of Monte Berico, crying beside the statue of Our Lady.

So the child grew clutching to her mother, afraid of her father, used to the hard work both in the home and fields shy, awkward, and her scholastic results were poor.

She attended the three school classes in the village and had to repeat the first class, which was a very strange thing even in those days.

At school and in the village she acquired the nickname of “the goose”, and all her life this nickname will remain with her both at home and in the convent.

If, at this point, we imagine a dialogue, in heaven, between God and the Enemy (similar to the tale, in which the Bible tells of Job), we would hear the voice of our “*poor*” faith and the doubts of which we speak, and say to the Lord of the Universe: “*Here is a really humiliated creature, try and make a Saint of her, if you can*”.

And God accepts the challenge.

Not, however, by taking her from that condition of Cinderella and making her hidden beauty shine, but by simply using, as it is in His plan, those lacerations that pedagogists and psychologists know how to foresee and describe so well.

Shy, awkward, and apparently of no value, Annette will remain all her life, always at the last place. It is there, at the end of the table, that Jesus looks on her with love, as He had promised in His parable. And from there he will call her to his Heart.

If her father was exacerbating, and the house cold and sad, she learns from her mother to take refuge in the small church in the village as though it were a home. She went there every morning, very early, carrying her clogs in order not to ruin them. There she understood what a real family was like and she felt in peace with all, even with that father who no one understood but condemned. After all, daddy had not a cruel heart, but it had hardened on account of his drinking wine and the difficulties he had and at times he noticed the child who tried to pray even at home.

When 'he', will have to give evidence at the canonical trials for the beatification of his daughter, he confesses that, sometimes, seeing the small child on her knees in a corner "with her hands in courtesy" (an antique way of saying "joined hands"), a lump would come to his throat and he felt as if he was going to choke, and he felt an urge to recite some Our Fathers.

At school no one took any notice of her considering her to be noticeably below average in intelligence; sometimes her homework was not corrected and her schoolmates, with the cruelty of their age, never forget to make her aware of the fact. "*I really don't mind*", she would answer humbly, and she truly did not feel anger or rebellion.

Only once will the teacher and her schoolmates remain uncomfortable before her, as though in the presence of an unknown world. During Holy Week the teacher tells the class of the passion of Jesus and Annette, burst into tears heartbroken: "*I am crying for the sufferings of the Lord, and because men are so cruel*", the child explained in her dialect.

It is for certain that the parish priest, having taken a more authentic and profound look at this child, going against the opinions and to the marvel of all, he will admit her to Holy Communion at eight and a half years old, when the authorised age in those years was eleven.

It was the year 1897; the year in which Theresa of Lisieux died, the saint who would remind the Church and the enter world of the tenderness with which Gods looks on what seems to the world to be small and weak.

At twelve years old, the parish priest infringing the rules once again, accepts her to join the association of the "Children of Mary", in which the girls could join only on having reached the age of twelve.

That saintly priest looked at the child's soul, he loved her and she did not seem so ignorant to him. He gave her a catechism as a gift and he seemed to have an intuition that she would always keep it with her and study it every day: they found it in the pocket of her habit, when she died, at thirty-four years old.

The parish priest was also taken by surprise when the fifteen year old girl tells him that she wishes to consecrate her life to God, in any order, it was not important, he could choose,

"But you are not able to do anything! The nuns would not know what to do with you!"

"That is true, master" the girl candidly answered (in her dialect).

So he explained that it would be better if she remained at home and gave a hand with the work in the fields.

But when the priest was praying before the Blessed Sacrament and the things he had said did not seem to be so obvious.

When he met her again he asked her:

“Are you still decided on entering a convent? Tell me something: do you know how to peel potatoes at least?”

“Oh yes, Father, I am able to do that at least”.

“Alright, you need to know nothing else”.

His rough tone was the equivalent to the gentleness of Saint Theresa of Lisieux, who in those same years had made this observation:

“There are too many people who go before God with the pretence of being useful to Him”.

It seems that the same conversation, between the parish priest and the girl, was the same as the one that had been heard in Lourdes, between the Bishop and the humble Bernardette Soubirous.

On the other hand, the three, Bernradette, Theresa and Bertilla, really seem to be spiritual sisters.

So she entered the convent, convinced that they were doing her a great honour in accepting her, an unmerited favour, and the last place for her would always be the right one, the right one for her.

She was happy and grateful for everything: *“I will remember that I am here thanks to a special grace, she writes her note-book, and everything that I shall receive I will receive it as something I am not be worthy of”.*

At the beginning her father was annoyed at the thought of having to give a few hundred lire that were necessary for a dowry, miserable though it be, but he gave in saying: *“It must be her destiny to go into a convent. Yes, yes, I will give her the money and let her follow he destiny”.*

Thus, twice, this father who had not succeeded in being a good father, knows how to pronounce a word that was full of “objective faith”: he perceived a destiny, which belonged to his daughter and to which he gives in. Having been said by him, it was a sullen but true acknowledgement of God the Fathers’ law and rights.

He himself will accompany her to the convent, pulling the cart with his daughter’s poor dowry: an earthly picture which most surely moved our Heavenly Father, and made this man, uncouth and of poor faith, worthy of the grace of a holy death, at an old age, surrounded by reverence and affection, thanks to his daughter who had become a saint.

During her novice-ship, that which Annette, now known as Sister Bertilla, would have had to learn by mystical practice and virtue, she already knew “naturally”.

She will have to learn the fundamentals of all spiritual lives and all the mystics; that is: God is All and the nullity of his creatures, on which Frances d’Assisi, Catherine of Siena, John of

the Cross and thousands of other saints, had lengthily mediated, and will not argue or find tiring.

She will have to practice to learn to know God and to learn to know herself (according to the Saint Augustine's aphorism: "Noverin Te, Domine, noverim me", and she, unaware, would explain to a companion that this was so obvious: "*When we are humiliated, we should not loose time in pondering on the fact, but say to the Lord: that I may know Thee, that I may know myself*").

She was really convinced of her "nullity" and that the others, educated, capable, were all better than her and that they all had the right to her attention and services.

She would go to the Teacher and ask with disarming genuineness:

"I am not able to do anything. I am a poor goose. Will you teach me what I must do? I want to become a saint".

To us, who are careful and will fight to the end in order to maintain the prestige we have earned, and make it a question of dignity, this could cause us to be annoyed in seeing a creature reduced to such a degree of humility (or perhaps of humiliation). But we must not allow ourselves to be deceived.

With all our dignity, we are afraid or ashamed to say that we want to become saints. She considered it a right and a necessity.

It is as if our pretentious dignity often guards a fragile and uncertain 'ego'; while Bertilla's humility and even her auto-humiliation guarded an 'ego' that was consistent and as pure as a diamond

It was her desire for sanctity, and the certainty that it was possible even for her to become a saint, through the grace of God, that protected her from retiring into herself, from nervous breakdowns or existential crisis's. It was this desire and certainty that made her "living at the last place" evangelic.

For the same reason, she experienced the profound beauty and truth of the words like, "obedience", "poverty", "humility", "silence", "kindness". It was congenial to choose the undesirable places, the hardest work, the generous duties and never complaining. "*I'll do it*, she so often said, for tasks that no one else wanted to do, "*I'll do it. It's my duty*". Even when they did her wrong or they neglected her; she never seethed in the offence.

At the end of her first year as a novice she was sent to the hospital in Treviso, because it was a difficult environment, also from a moral point of view, and they thought that her humble simplicity would have changed things a little.

It was a hospital with a lot of problems, in phases of continuous refurbishing, with inadequate divisions and unprepared staff, a theatre of Trade Union and political conflicts, of virulent clashes between freemasonry, socialists and clergy, which often boomeranged back on the nuns.

In 1907, when Bertilla, nineteen years of age, entered the hospital, three nuns were sent away, out of spite more than for valid reasons. The newspaper *Voce del Popolo*, (a diocesan weekly) published a significant paragraph: "*They sent them away. They were three angels of charity (...)who assisted the ill with maximum care and self-denial (and...). They drove them away as if you would, thieves, giving them eight days to find another roof and another master. The Hebrew Lord Mayor and the freemasonry Borough Council clerks, just to please the socialist scoundrels...they sent them away*".

This was the environment and the atmosphere.

Here she found waiting for her a Mother Superior who was efficient and brisk who gave her a quick look, she esteemed her immediately and sent her to the nun's kitchen, to be a dishwasher, without the possibility of having contact with doctors or patients. Here she will remain for a year, without interruption, among stoves, pots and pans and the sink.

On the other hand, during her novice-ship, she wrote this prayer in her note book of spiritual notes: *"My Jesus, I implore you through your Holy Wounds that I may die a thousand times rather than permit that I do a single action in order to be noticed!"*

Therefore she did not rebel when they confined her to this place where there were no possibilities of being either admired or in doing anything that was to merit the attention of others. Certainly, her heart and desire was to look and take care of the ill, but she had been told to remain in the kitchen and take care of the cutlery and she learned to wash plates, while praying. *"My Lord, wash my soul and prepare it for tomorrows Eucharist"*.

If she had done this complaining both with her lips and heart, then she would had been a slave; but with that prayer, in her 'last place', she looked at God and this was enough for her to feel invited to God's altar.

After a year she was recalled to Vicenza for her religious profession, even though the Mother superior of Treviso had tried, of her own account, to send her away, so much so was her "firm idea of the inability of Sister Bertilla".

When she became a nun having taken her vows, they sent her back again to the hospital in Treviso. *"My God, she is here again!"*, was the Mother Superiors comment when she saw her. She needed professional nurses, and they insisted on sending her that 'half creature'.

Naturally they sent her once again to the kitchen. Ten days later one of the responsible of a very difficult and delicate division died. At first the mother Superior dispelled the temptation of thinking of giving Sister Bertilla this responsibility; but there was no one else. She even prayed to God to forgive the imprudence committed, then she however entrusted the division to Sister Bertilla.

Thus, at twenty years of age, Bertilla began her mission as a nurse. The division was that of contagiously ill children; almost all these children had diphtheria, they had to undergo tracheotomy or intubating, in need of continuous assistance; a distraction could mean a child's life.

Above all life was a continuous regime of urgency, without fixed timetables, without any outside contacts, not even for daily mass.

We must remember that we are in an epoch in which children often arrive from faraway towns in the middle of freezing cold nights, in serious conditions for the septicaemia in course, in wobbling carts, cyanotic from the progressive asphyxia, in need of the intelligent, immediate assistance of all.

It was on one hand the contact with the children, on the other the participating in these sufferings so tragic and innocent that seem to free Sister Bertilla of her awkwardness, all her shyness and make her "sweet", tranquil, serene, shrewd", as the doctors said.

It is opportune to read the testimonies of the doctors who had her as an assistant. Here is one: *"Children are admitted to the ward with diphtheria; they have been taken from their families and they find themselves in such a state of agitation, of depression, so much so that it is not easy to calm them, for two or three days they are like little beasts, beating, boxing, rolling*

under the bed, refusing food. Now Sister Bertilla succeeded in rapidly becoming a mother to them all; after two or three hours the child, who was desperate, clung to her, calmly, as to his mother and followed her wherever she went. The ward, under her action, presented a moving spectacle: groups of children clinging unto her. The ward was really exemplar”.

It may only seem to be an affable picture, but then the doctors go on describing what happened with the parents when the death of their child had to be announced. She was the only one who was able to find the appropriate words for their despair. The doctors themselves, moreover (the young doctors especially who were terrorised in having to practice their first tracheotomy), will always find her by their sides, without a sign of nervousness or tiredness, in the most critical and agitated moments.

It even happened that when it was time to leave the hospital, the children would cry because they had to leave her and the doctors smilingly tell of the episode of the little girl who said she could not go away because she had “so much affection for the nun”.

“Sister Bertilla always gave me the impression that there was someone beside her who guided and helped her; because a person who rises, in their mission of charity, above others, who also live by the same laws, behave with the same tension, while not having (looking at her materially) any quality or intelligence or culture that would make her superior to others, she really gave the impression that she acted...as if she was following an angel that conducted her. It is not possible for a doctor to think of a person like Sister Bertilla, who passes one, two, three, fifteen nights without sleep, and she presents herself always in the same manner, neglecting herself, without signs of tiredness or the illness that undermined her, I repeat, something inside and outside that sublimated her..Not only, but the fact that she transited such an influence on other, such a persuasion that is not found in other people.”.

To note that the doctor who describes her like this is a free-thinker, a freemasonry who will convert, as we will tell further on, when he sees her dying “full of joy”.

Sister Bertilla will spend two years with the ‘contagious’ patients, than she will spend time in all the divisions, leaving behind her, in her fifteen years of hospital life, the same dear and holy memory.

Another sister will tell of how at times, when the nuns were in the refectory, and some new patients arrived. If the responsible said: *“There is a patient for Sister Bertilla”, “everyone knew that it was a poor miserable person, miserable and full of parasites, if not tuberculosis”.* She had given the others the habit of turning to her when particularly unpleasant situations were presented, from which not only the nurses but the hospital attendants also fled.

When the Mother Superior told her to be cautious, she answered:

“Mother Superior, I feel as if I am serving God”, and she never avoided excessive work or defended herself even when ill-treated by the more nervous patients. She seemed to have no pride, but only the desire to love and serve.

In 1915 the Great War broke out, when the Piave became the most advanced line, danger was immediate and constant: *“In these times of war and terror, Sister Bertilla wrote in her faithful note-book, “I pronounce my “Ecce, venio!”. Here I am, Lord, to do according to your will, under whatever aspect it presents itself, let it be life, death or terror”.*

It might seem to be a nun’s pious prayer. It was a silent and heroic choice, each time that the bombs hit the city and everyone ran to the shelters, to remain beside the beds of the patients who could not be moved; praying and giving glasses of marsala to those who fainted from fear.

She would become pale, terrorised even more than the others would, but she remained.

“Are you not afraid, Sister Bertilla?” the Mother Superior would ask her.

“Do not worry, Mother” she answered, *“God gives me such much strength that I do not even feel it”*.

And so they sent her to the Lazzaretto (a dependency of the hospital), situated near a railway joint, that was mostly the object of air attacks, to substitute a nun who could not stand the fear: *“Do not think about me, Mother”*, she would say to the responsible who felt guilty about asking her to sacrifice herself, *“it is enough for me to know that I can be useful”*.

In 1917, after the evasion of Friuli, the hospital had to be evacuated and the patients were divided into three groups. Sister Bertilla left with two hundred patients for Brianza and they put the patients who had typhus in her care. Then in 1918 they sent her to the province of Como to a sanatorium for soldiers who had tuberculosis, she will stay there for a year.

To tell how she lived such a *Via Crucis*, would be repetitive; because the sanctity of this humble woman consists in the continuity, never interrupting of words, gestures, attitudes, decisions, that always went in the same direction, with that daily fidelity in all trials, that is the greatest miracle to be seen.

We are not talking only of a *post mortem* letter, or of a successive revocation, when we tend to see everything beautiful and good.

When a chaplain lieutenant, in that same year, returned home fully recovered, he felt it his duty to write a letter to the general Mother Superior, to thank her *“for the good work that her Daughters were doing in that house of suffering...Among them all, he writes, Sister Bertilla distinguishes herself. She is occupied with the soldiers who are on the top floor of the hotel, which has been turned into a hospital; she is all consuming in care and charity, as a mother would for her child, a sister for a brother. The necessities of the poor souls, certainly compassionate in their incurable decease, where many, and the organisation of the hospital made it very difficult to distribute what was necessary. Sister Bertilla, in order to find a balsam for a patient would have gone through fire, she could not rest and the number of times she went up and down those long stairs (100 steps) to the kitchen to fetch something or another...”*.

Years later in order to be more precise, he will tell of an episode that makes us understand the charity that marvelled him.

“The Spanish influenza had hit our hospital; the victims of this epidemic were dozens, many of whom died. The fever, of which almost all of us were affected, rose to frightening proportions. We slept with the windows open; these were the sanatorium orders, and in order to moderate the coldness of the night the use of hot water bottles was allowed. It happened on an evening in October that the boiler broke-down, which meant that this small comfort was not possible. I cannot explain the uproar that went on during that hour. The vice-director tried to calm the up-roar, trying his best to make the soldiers understand that the desired hot water was not available for everyone: and furthermore the kitchen attendants were entitled to their rest. What a surprise for all, when late during the night, they saw a little nun who was going around the ward, from bed to bed, giving every patient the desired hot water bottle. She had gone to trouble of lighting a fire in the yard and heating the water in small pots.. The morning after everyone was talking about that nun who had come back on duty without having rested or slept..”.

As a reward she found a meticulous superior, who was only worried that Bertilla was too attached to her soldiers. Such care she took, seemed excessive, certain preoccupations too involving; and her patients became too fond of her, in her opinion, exaggerating. So she relieved

her of her responsibility in the sanatorium and sent her to the laundry, where her job was to secrete piles of infected bed linen. Furthermore, as the superior considered that work of little importance, every now and again she did not forget to observe (with the cruelty of which only the mediocre are capable of, even more than the wicked) that Bertilla “did not even earn the bread she ate”. It was Sister Bertilla's time of “passion”.

The Mother Superior went so far that Bertilla was sent back to the motherhouse: “Here I am, Mother, she said on her arrival, *“her I am a useless nun that can be of no good to the community”*”.

Jesus had used the incomprehension of creatures in order to answer the prayer that she often prayed to Him: *“To always be with you, in Heaven, I want to share all the bitterness of this valley of tears: I wish to love you so much, by sacrifice, by the cross, suffering”*.

Who wants to escape at all costs, from sufferance, will never be able to understand the miracle that happens when the desire to participate in Christ's Cross takes hold of a heart. It happens as though Jesus' passion is renewed for us, to save all the souls on earth. The Superior general, who loved her, entrusted her with a task that was more than a reward for Bertilla. She had looked after children who had diphtheria, than soldiers with tuberculosis, now the Mother superior was sending her to a villa near Monte Berico to assist the seminars, who had been hit by the epidemic of fever that had cost the lives of many of them. So she could care for the boys who were destined to become priests, the most precious members of the Body of Christ.

What she writes, during those months, in her notebook are saturated with her love for the Blessed Virgin, it was as if She was once again with the child and her mother under the portico of the same Sanctuary.

“Oh my dear Madonna, I do not ask for visions, or revelations, or pleasures, or kindness, not even spiritual ones. In this world I do not wish for anything more than that which you wished for when you were here on earth; to believe with all my heart and soul, without seeing, or pleasure, to suffer with joy, without consolation. To work hard for you, until I die”.

After five months she was able to return to Treviso, assigned once again to her contagious children patients, until the head physician of the medical department ask for her.

Always the same goodness, the same humility, the same peace and the same inexhaustible impulse to give, notwithstanding a visceral tumour had been killing her for some time. She had undergone surgery at twenty years of age, but the tumour had not stopped spreading. Then again she neglected herself, because of a misunderstood and invincible sense of modesty

She became more and more spiritually detached from herself: *“I have nothing that is my own, only my free will, and I, with the grace of God, am ready and resolute, cost what it may, to never do as I wish, and I do this out of pure love of Jesus, as if neither hell or Heaven exists, or even the comfort of a pure conscience”*.

Without ever suspecting, she reached summits, which only the greatest mystics had reached.

On the 16th October 1922 it was evident to all that she was unable to remain on her feet. At midday the doctor visited her, the surgeon decided to operate immediately, the day after. She had been on the breach up to her last hours of life. They removed a tumour that had invaded her abdomen cavity, but it was clear that she would not recover.

The news spread through the hospital that Sister Bertilla was dying and immediately it was a rush of the head physician, doctors and nurses, to her room.

"You would think she was a saint!" said one of those sisters who had always considered her a "good for nothing".

Some, seeing her suffering so meekly, in tears tried to console her. *"You must not cry. If we want to see Jesus, we have to die. I am happy"*.

However, she spoke in her dialect, as she had always done. *"You must tell the sisters, she said to the Mother superior, that they must work for God because everything else is worthless, everything else is worthless"*.

Zuccardi Merli, the doctor who was a free-thinker and freemasonry, of whom we have spoken of, watched Sister Bertilla as she was dying and he felt something change in his heart: *"I can assure, that the dawn of my spiritual change was given through the vision of Sister Bertilla when she was on the verge of death,"* he witnesses. *"In fact, for her, whose hand I kissed before she passed away, dying was so visible for everyone, a joy. She died a death like no one else I had seen dying, like someone who is already in an improved state of life. Oppressed by an atrociously painful ailment, bloodless, certain she would die, in that state in which the patient usually clutches to the doctor and asks. 'Save me', to hear her pronounce with a smile that I cannot describe: "Be happy, my sisters, I am going to my God", this was the thing that suggested an auto criticism on my part and that now I see as being sister Bertilla's first miracle. In fact I said to myself: "This creature is as though she was far from us, even if still alive. There is a part of her that is material, that which remains with us, that gives thanks, that comforts those around her; but there is a spiritual part far from us, above us, which is more evident and domineering: the spiritual part that is already rejoicing in that happiness that had been the yearning of her life..."*

In these words, apparently difficult and complicated, you can hear the rationalist who has been put before the evidence of the supernatural; he who had always denied the existence of a soul, is almost constricted to seeing it while God retakes it and startles it with joy, and the body abandons.

Thus, this humble little nun, who everyone had considered "a poor goose", takes with her, in her faith, that intellectual who was so proud of his science and his freethinking. She who dying had in the pocket of her habit a worn-out catechism and who usually said:

"I am ignorant, but I believe in everything that the Church believes in".

To a nun who was questioning her on her "spiritual life", she answered: *I do not know what it is to 'savour the Lord'. I am quite content by being good at washing plates and offering God my work". I know nothing about spiritual life. Mine is the "the way of the carts"*.

She always felt the country girl who was used to country roads, roads that lead to work, roads on which one travels without airs, pretences of elegance or distractions.

This country girl knew how to write, in her Italian full of grammatical errors, words full of nobleness and purity.

"God and I alone, internal external recollection, continuous prayer, this is the air I breathe; never-ending work, diligent, but with calmness and order. I am God's creature, God created me and he protects me, reason wanted that I am entirely His. I seek happiness, but true happiness I find only in God. I must do God's will without asking for anything in return, with no other desires, with cheerfulness and laughter. I implore God that he may help me to win my

ego, to understand what is right and what is wrong, that He may help me to do at all costs His holy will, without asking for anything more.....”.

When she was beatified in 1952, Pope Pious X11 said: *“She is not a dismaying model ...In her humility she defined her path as ‘the way of the carts’, the most common, that of the Catechism”.*